

REMARKS

Claims 5, 7, and 8 are now pending in the application. Claims 5 and 7 are amended. Claim 6 is cancelled. The following remarks are considered by Applicants to overcome each rejection raised by the Examiner and to place the application in condition for allowance. Applicants respectfully acknowledge the Examiner for indicating that claims 5, 7, and 8 contain allowable subject matter. An early Notice of Allowance is therefore requested.

Claims 5-8 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Stylli (WO 98/52047). The Examiner takes the position that Stylli teaches and/or suggests all the features recited in claims 5-8. Applicants respectfully disagree.

Stylli discloses a system that utilizes automated and integrateable workstations for identifying chemicals having useful activity. Specifically, Sytlli discloses an arrangement having a central transport system which is used for transferring samples between the different workstations. Stylli also discloses a storage and retrieval workstation that is used for storing and providing chemical substances.

It is submitted that Stylli does not teach or suggest all the feature of the claimed invention. Specifically, Stylli does not teach or suggest an internal modular transport system for transporting the microtiter plates between said different devices and said at least one central transport system for asynchronous plate transfer between individual modules via input and output buffers. Even more specifically, it is submitted that Stylli does not teach or suggest input and output buffers within the individual modules.

Stylli discloses an automated system for analyzing chemical samples. The arrangement disclosed by Stylli comprises a central transport system which is used for transferring samples between the different workstations. The automated system consists of several modules, which are identified as workstations by Stylii. Stylii also discloses a storage and retrieval module.

The central transport system disclosed by Stylli comprises intersections, which can be used to route addressable wells to workstations. However, it is submitted that Stylli does not teach or suggest the use of input and output buffers within each module. In contrast to the claimed invention, Stylii only discloses that the sample transporter having two transport lanes for each direction. One of the transport lanes is denoted as queuing lane 311. Its purpose is to provide a queuing lane for a workstation. The second lane is denoted as passing lane 312. It permits rapid transport of work units to a distant workstation. Particular input and output

buffers related to transferring work units from the lane to the workstation and back are not provided. Therefore, it is submitted that Stylii fails to teach or suggest the features recited in claim 5.

It should be that although, the Office Action notes that the storage and retrieval module is operably linked to at least one plate buffer that loads and unloads the plates in a predetermined order. The purpose of the plate buffer is to minimize the processing time at workstations downstream. Therefore, it is not the same as the input and output buffers provided within the modules.

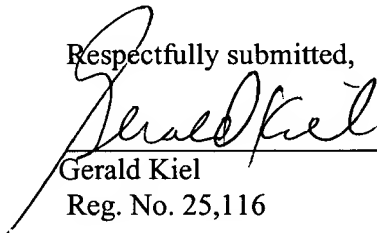
Thus, it is respectfully submitted that Stylii does not teach or suggest an internal transport system for transporting the microtiter plates between said different devices and said at least one central transport system for asynchronous plate transfer between individual modules via input and output buffers, wherein the input and output buffers are provided within the individual modules. Therefore, Applicants respectfully request the withdrawal of the rejection of claim 5 under 35 U.S.C. 102(b).

Claims 6-8 are dependent upon claim 5. It is submitted that these claims recite patentable subject matter for at least the reasons mentioned above. Therefore, Applicants also request the withdrawal of the rejection of claims 6-8.

In view of the above remarks presented, it is respectfully requested that all of the claims be considered and allowed. If the Examiner believes that additional issues need to be resolved before this application can be passed to issue, the undersigned invites the Examiner to contact him at the telephone number provided below.

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Respectfully submitted,



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